

Facing the Right way?

Saddle tree points – direction, angle and width – critically impact equine scapular health. Let's look at the importance of direction.

BY JOCHEN SCHLEESE, CSFT, CMS CEE

With complex physiological issues, veterinarians may recommend treatments to alleviate symptoms. The horse benefits greatly when the health care team works together, combining knowledge to understand underlying factors. This series discusses concepts to assist professionals in the diagnostic process.

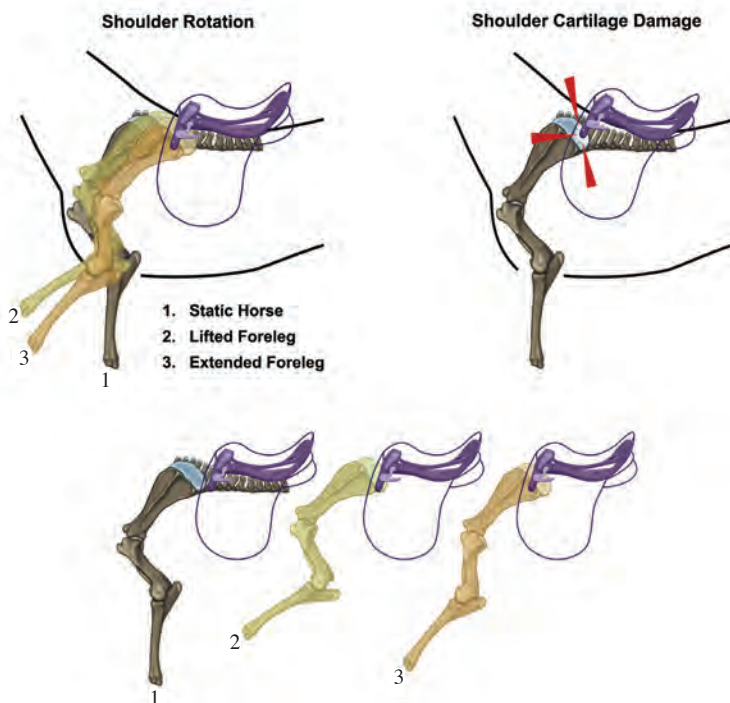
Tree points are either forward facing, straight (perpendicular to the ground) or rear facing.

- Forward facing tree points cause proven detrimental effects to shoulder health. MRIs and fiber optic cameras have shown the cartilage chipping that can occur as scapulae rotate upwards-backwards. Every time the foreleg is extended (during trot, gallop, simultaneously when jumping), tree points will hit the scapulae, potentially causing damage at the skeletal level. In

some countries, the manufacture of saddles with traditional forward facing trees has been banned.

- Straight tree points are marginally better, but still contact at the scapula, especially during extended movement of the leg or during jumping.
- Rear facing tree points, which mimic the scapular angle allowing maximum freedom of shoulder movement – upwards and backwards – provide optimal scapular clearance and health.

My point? Check the direction of the saddle tree points! Ensure the horse's scapulae have room to move without hitting tree points with every step. **IVC**



✓ Check point

Demonstrate by lifting the foreleg and doing a “pedalling” motion with it to see how far the scapula rotates (usually 4” to 8”), marking the shoulder positions with chalk. If during movement, the horse’s scapulae hit an immobile, hard-edged object (the tree point), the uncomfortable results are irritation, restricted movement, pain and eventual cartilage damage. It’s similar to a person walking and banging her knees against a wooden board with every step – not painful at first, but the cumulative effect is knee damage.



JOCHEN SCHLEESE IS A CERTIFIED MASTER SADDLER WHO GRADUATED FROM PASSIER, AND CAME TO CANADA AS OFFICIAL SADDLER AT THE 1986 WORLD DRESSAGE CHAMPIONSHIPS. HE REGISTERED THE TRADE OF SADDLERY IN NORTH AMERICA IN 1990. JOCHEN’S LIFELONG STUDY OF EQUINE DEVELOPMENT, SADDLE DESIGN, THE BIO-MECHANICS OF HORSE AND RIDER IN MOTION, AND THE EFFECTS OF ILL-FITTING SADDLES, LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SADDLEFIT 4 LIFE IN 2005 (SADDLEFIT4LIFE.COM), A GLOBAL NETWORK OF EQUINE PROFESSIONALS DEDICATED TO PROTECTING HORSE AND RIDER FROM LONG TERM DAMAGE.